



News Release

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DOI's Aviation Management Directorate Enhances Arctic Ecosystem Change Study

Agreement Leads to Commercial Helicopter deployment on US Coast Guard Ship

WASHINGTON – The Department of the Interior (DOI) National Business Center's (NBC) Aviation Management Directorate (AMD) announces an agreement which allows for the first ever deployment of a commercial aircraft on a United States military ship. AMD assembled the disparate parts, and consummated an agreement, that allows for the National Science Foundation (NSF) to embark and launch a commercial Bell 206L3 Long Ranger helicopter off of the U.S. Coast Guard Cutter HEALY, a Polar Class Icebreaker. This particular arrangement augments an agreement through which NSF scientists use the HEALY as a base for various research programs, from biological studies of ecosystem change to seismic studies helping understand the earth's history

Previous to this new arrangement, the Arctic science missions were completed using one of the USCG's HH-65 helicopters embarked on the HEALY. The Bell Long Ranger helicopter's weight is about a third of that of the HH-65. The two blade, single engine single pilot Bell 206L3 is also smaller than the four blade HH-65. Because of the reduction in weight and size, the launch and recovery of the new helicopter can be accomplished by a crew of three, which is a reduction from a crew of six to eight needed for the HH-65. The reduction in size and weight also increases the air time per sortie across the Arctic icescape.



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AMD negotiated the use of the Bell 206L3 Long Ranger, as well as the pilot and mechanic, with Maritime Helicopters of Homer Alaska. AMD also provided the helicopter manager that provides safety training for the NSF scientists and operations liaison between the HEALY crew and commercial pilot. In addition to the provision of an approved operator, AMD also provided pilot evaluation and aircraft evaluation for operations on vessels at sea.

The mission of Aviation Management Directorate (AMD), formally known as the DOI Office of Aircraft Services prior to its merger with the NBC in 2001, is to “Raise the safety standards, increase the efficiency, and promote the economical operation of aircraft activities in the Department of the Interior”. Two of AMD’s functions in this capacity are developing and implementing an aviation user-training program to meet Department-wide and specific bureau needs; and furnishing technical assistance for specialized aviation problems within the DOI and other Federal Agencies that utilize AMD services.

After the first four sorties of the Bell 206L3 off of the Coast Guard ship, Lieutenant Commander Jim Dalitsch the Operations Officer of the HEALY, stated “The program is hassle free and creates no additional workload for Coast Guard personnel. The aviation contingent is self-sufficient and enables the safe and comfortable achievement of the embarked science party's objectives.” From an AMD perspective, this exemplifies the long standing Department of the Interior aviation policies of safe operations through established procedures. A second cruise planned for July through August will utilize two (2) Long Rangers from Maritime Helicopters that will double the efficiency of sorties and the mission accomplishment of the NSF.